Amendments to the Claims

Please replace the claims with the following:

1. (Currently amended) A method for interconnecting tubulars by forge welding, the method comprising:

shaping the tubular ends that are to be welded together into a shaped configuration ~~an inwardly sloping configuration~~ wherein each tubular includes an end face that is parallel to a plane normal to the axis of the tubular and defined by the wall thickness of the tubular, wherein the end face of the one of the tubulars has an annular convex shape and the end face of the other tubular has an annular concave shape that is complementary to and intermeshes with said convex shape;

wherein the convex shape has a sloping configuration such that the average diameter D(t) of the tip of the convex shape is different than the average diameter D(b) of the tubular wall as measured at the center of the wall thickness; and

in which the sloping configuration is such that when the tubular ends are heated during the forge welding process the heated tubular ends deform as a result of thermal expansion into a substantially longitudinally oriented cylindrical shape, wherein the sloping angle of the inner and outer walls of the tubular ends is selected such that the ratio between the average diameter D(t) of the tip of the tubular end and the average diameter D(b) of the base of the tubular end is related to an estimated temperature difference between said tip and base of the tubular end during the forge welding process and a thermal expansion co-efficient of the steel grade or grades of the tubular end; and

~~wherein the end face of the wall of one of the tubular ends has a convex shape and the end face of the wall of the other tubular end has a concave shape that is complementary to and intermeshes with said convex shape~~.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said ratio D(t)/D(b) is between 0.8 and 0.99.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the tubular ends are machined to a reduced wall thickness in the welding zone.

5. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein tubulars comprise a relatively lower grade steel base pipe and a relatively higher grade steel cladding on the inner and/or outer surface of the base pipe and the end faces are shaped such that when the tubular ends are pressed together the end faces of the cladding(s) touch each other before the end faces of the base pipe ends touch each other.

6. (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein the tubular ends are wedge shaped and the tips of the wedges are formed by the claddings.

7. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein only the adjacent end portions of adjacent base pipes are covered with clad metal to allow further machining of said end portions without exposing the base pipes.

8. (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein during at least part of the forge welding operation a flushing gas is flushed around the welding zone and at least part of the flushing gas is injected into the welding zone from the uncladded side of the tubular, such that the injected flushing gas can continue to reach the ends of the still spaced base pipes after the claddings have touched each other.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the flushing gas is a reducing flushing gas.

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 9, wherein the flushing gas is a non-explosive mixture of an inert gas and a reducing gas.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein the inert gas comprises helium, argon, nitrogen, and/or carbon dioxide and the reducing gas comprises hydrogen and/or carbon monoxide.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 11, wherein the non-explosive flushing gas mixture comprises more than 90% by volume of an inert gas and at least 2% by volume of hydrogen.

13. (Canceled).